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FILE ONLY

Weinberger sees rise in arms to Nicaragua

By Walter Andrews
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The Soviet supply of arms to Marxist Nicaragua has increased tremendously in an apparent attempt to intimidate its neighbors and influence any peace agreement, according to U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.

Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" program Sunday if the United States were prepared to intercept the supplies at sea, the defense secretary said, "The United States is prepared for a number of contingencies that might arise."

Mr. Weinberger also said "there has never been any confirmation" of reports that high-performance MiG-21 jet fighter aircraft were aboard a Soviet freighter that docked in the Nicaraguan Pacific port of Corinto last week.

He attributed such news reports, which administration spokesmen had downplayed, to unauthorized leaks of "many intelligence reports" in violation of security rules.

"This tremendously increased flow of offensive weaponry to Nicaragua from the Soviet Union and from Cuba and from Libya — all of these things have the effect of intimidating their neighbors and removing a lot of the leverage the neighbors might otherwise possess, forgetting a final agreement that would preserve the security of both countries," the defense secretary said.

Mr. Weinberger apparently was referring to an agreement being negotiated through the so-called Contadora process by nations in the region with the United States as a participant.

Asked what heavy arms were being supplied to the Nicaraguans, the secretary said there were, "Pictures of boxes that are believed to be ammunition, heavy weaponry, shells, things [that] would improve their capabilities in the form of attack helicopters."

The defense secretary added, "The volumes and numbers the Soviets have been supplying — that's the critical factor in all this, not whether the crates contain one thing or another thing. It's the constant flow of offensive weaponry that [makes] Nicaragua able to take the kind of position they do."

Mr. Weinberger gave no hint of what finally had persuaded the administration the suspect crates did not contain the MiG-21 fighters, which the United States has said it

would not allow to become part of the Nicaraguan armed forces.

Government sources who are usually well-informed said last week that crates of a type usually containing MiG fighters had been loaded last month on the Soviet freighter.

"All of this discussion about whether there were or were not MiGs is highly classified and should not have been out in public print at all because of the sources and materials and methods of gathering this kind of information," Mr. Weinberger said.

He said he was not blaming the press for the unauthorized disclosures. But he commented, "Some-

times it's the better part of valor not to print everything that somebody feeds out or leaks."

Mr. Weinberger sidestepped the question when asked if Nicaragua could become a second Cuba, which he said is clearly a Soviet base that has greatly complicated the defense of the continental United States.

The defense secretary said, however, "One Cuba is a big problem and a second Cuba would be twice that kind of problem."

As he has done many times before, the secretary said there are no plans to use American troops in Central America. He said any such use of American soldiers would require the overwhelming support of the American people.

"We should never again do what we did in Vietnam, which is to go in without enough force and intending not to win," he added.

The Nicaraguans have about 40 pilots who trained in Bulgaria and are qualified to fly MiG-21 planes. The planes are old models but there is no equal to them in the inventory of any Central American country. The MiG-21s fly at 700 mph, are configured for air-to-air or ground support operations, which could be used against the Contras, rebels fighting Nicaragua's Sandinista regime. The Contras have no anti-aircraft weapons that could touch the MiGs if they were employed in the area.